

Closure of a Zeitgeist Movement Chapter: Colombia – A Case Study

*by Kari McGregor
TZM Australia
GCA representative for Asia-Pacific*

Introduction

This document aims to deal with the potential closure of a chapter by fully addressing all complaints listed, ensuring consistency in the treatment of all chapters, and ensuring consistency with protocol. The case study referred to is of the Colombian chapter, a chapter that has recently been slated for closure by some, but by no means all, members of the Global Chapters Administration.

Problems listed with the Colombian chapter, the case in point, are detailed in the document: [Colombia Chapter Review](#), by Nelson Alvarez, dated Monday 5th November 2012, as pertaining to the following:

- 1. Chapter Website**
- 2. Chapter Coordination**
- 3. Visible Chapter Activity**
- 4. Issues with Chapter members**
- 5. Criticism from chapter members**

These issues will be addressed in this document in a systematic process, and conclusions will be drawn at the end of each section that are in accordance with the protocols and procedures established by the Global Chapters Administration (hereafter referred to as GCA) in 2011.

Please note that it is not the aim of this document to call for the closure of any other chapter. Any comparisons present are made with the intention of highlighting inconsistencies in treatment or application of protocol. In the unfortunate case of any information being incorrectly represented in this document please do not hesitate to [contact me](#) with an amendment. A great deal of research has been conducted in order to produce this document, and any errors are due to my unassisted attempts to collate a great deal of information – information that is unavailable from GCA resources – in a very restricted time-frame.

1. Chapter Website

According to the Colombia Chapter Review, the following problems have been encountered on the Colombia chapter website.

a) There are no links to:

- The Global Site
- Mission statement
- TZM Structure
- FAQ
- Basic information on how/what to do to create a chapter
- A contact form or a visible contact email available on the site.

At present there is no GCA protocol in existence that outlines how websites should be constructed. However, there is a procedure followed by the GCA in assisting chapters with their establishment and development that is consistent across all chapters. For the sake of consistency across the Movement it is agreed that all chapter websites should contain:

- A link to the global site
- An “About” section featuring
 - The most up-to-date version of the TZM mission statement
 - The most up-to-date version of the TZM structure
 - The most up-to-date version of the TZM FAQ

For the sake of facilitating engagement with a chapter for any newcomer to the Movement it is agreed that all chapters should make the following easily visible and accessible via their website:

- A contact form or email contact
- Basic information regarding how to become involved; this may include:
 - How to join a chapter, and
 - How to establish a chapter, or
 - How to engage with projects/teams

The following sub-sections detail how the issues reported on in the *Colombia Chapter Review* with the Colombian website are far from exclusive to Colombia, being issues that appear in many official chapter websites.

Missing links to the Global Site

Regarding links to the global site – this is something that can be easily rectified, yet is also lacking in a number of other chapters. Other chapters without links to the global site include:

- Europe
 - UK
 - Switzerland
 - Sweden
 - Spain
 - Russia
 - Poland
 - Norway
 - Ireland
 - Denmark
 - Czech Republic (also links to Zeitgeist: The Movie)
- Africa
 - South Africa
- North America
 - Canada (old link so not working)
- Latin America
 - Venezuela
 - Peru
 - Guatemala
 - Ecuador
 - Chile
 - Argentina
 - Costa Rica
 - Uruguay (incorrect link + many incorrect/out of date links)

- Asia-Pacific
 - Singapore
 - India

The global site also has a link to TZM Paraguay, which appears to no longer be active. The domain has apparently been sold to a commercial organization which displays links to various commercial sites.

Missing Mission Statement

Regarding the Mission Statement there are a number of other chapters that either do not include any sort of mission statement, or do not include an up-to-date official version. These chapters include:

- Europe:
 - Belgium
 - Bulgaria
 - Poland
 - Finland
 - Switzerland
 - Macedonia
 - Serbia
 - Slovakia
- Africa
 - South Africa
- Latin America
 - Peru

Missing Structure Guide

Regarding the Official Structure there are a number of other chapters that do not include any sort of structure guide, and certainly not the official guide. These chapters include:

- Europe:
 - Belgium
 - Bulgaria
 - Denmark
 - Finland
 - Germany
 - Macedonia
 - Switzerland
 - Slovakia
 - Serbia
- Africa:
 - South Africa
- Latin America:
 - Peru

Missing FAQ/inappropriate FAQ

Regarding the FAQ there are many chapters that either do not have an FAQ at all, or which use an FAQ that is specific to The Venus Project (as answered by Jacque Fresco), and not one that is specific to the Zeitgeist Movement. These chapters are as follows:

- Europe:
 - Switzerland
 - Croatia
 - Slovakia
 - Poland (incomplete)
 - Czech Republic (coming soon)
 - Germany – only 1 Q in German
 - Slovenia – only in English
 - Portugal – loaded with TVP content
 - Serbia – exclusively TVP
 - Belgium – exclusively TVP
 - Bulgaria – exclusively TVP
 - Lithuania – exclusively TVP
 - Macedonia – exclusively TVP
 - Denmark – exclusively TVP
 - Russia – exclusively TVP
 - Greece – exclusively TVP
- Africa:
 - South Africa
- Latin America:
 - Peru
 - Uruguay

Missing information on how to start a chapter

Regarding the chapter section, there are many other chapters that fail to include a section on how to start a chapter. Many sites do not have any section for sub-chapters at all. However, many of these chapters have links to groups/teams/projects (arguably these are acceptable as a substitute for chapters in the case of national chapters that have agreed, by consensus, to concentrate on a variety of projects rather than local PR-oriented chapters) – many of which are active, although some chapters appear to be completely stagnant. Chapter sites without clear information on how to start a chapter are as follows:

- Europe
 - Belgium
 - Slovenia
 - Slovakia
 - Bulgaria
 - Czech Republic
 - Denmark
 - Poland
 - Germany
 - Finland
 - Switzerland
 - Lithuania
 - Serbia
 - Italy
 - UK
 - Macedonia
- Africa
 - South Africa
- Latin America
 - Mexico

- Peru
- Ecuador
- Asia-Pacific
 - Israel
 - New Zealand
 - Malaysia

It is agreed that all chapters are to be formally and individually advised of any necessary changes that are to be made to their websites by the GCA representative responsible for their region, and for a reasonable waiting period to be applied for the task to be complete. It is necessary to observe universal application of any requests and compliance, and for this to be supported by a protocol that is made available to all chapters.

b) Logo doesn't show the word 'Colombia' on it.

This is the case for most chapters as most chapters are using the TZM official logo. It is, therefore, not adequate as a reason to call for the closure of any chapter unless it is clearly stipulated that all chapters must include a logo on their website with their country's name on it. If all chapters are to make this change then a notification must be officially delivered, and a reasonable waiting period must apply.

c) Presentation:

- The Zeitgeist Movement exists fundamentally as the TVP's activist arm
- TVP Materials and Experimental City

d) Venus Project

Points c and d will be tackled together as they are essentially the same point: i.e. heavy or inappropriate focus on the Venus Project. In this case there are several chapters that overtly focus heavily on the Venus Project or do so in an inappropriate manner. Most sites link to TVP in some way or have some TVP content. However, I mention here mainly the chapter sites whose content is potentially misleading. These chapters include:

- Europe:
 - Belgium – Main page appeals too much to TVP/Jacque Fresco as a source of information/learning where there is alternative TZM content available but not used
 - Bulgaria – Main page appeals too much to TVP/Jacque Fresco as a source of information/learning; under “join the Movement” is a section that says “support Project Venus” – there is nothing about joining TZM
 - Croatia – The “About Us” section has a sub-section called “change” that is exclusively about TVP where there is alternative TZM content available but not used
 - Lithuania – A whole section from the main menu is dedicated to TVP
 - Slovakia – Heavy TVP focus throughout where there is alternative TZM content available but not used
- North America
 - Canada – A minor point, perhaps, but the mission statement lists the goal as “to spread the message of TVP”
- Latin America
 - Peru – Site has a “donation” section in the main menu leading to the purchase of a TVP t-shirt; no other merchandise is listed

Regarding presentation in a more general sense the Norwegian chapter site appears to be a wiki, and not a conventional website. For this reason it appears that many of the features expected of a website are not present or are difficult to identify. A wiki seems like a very positive addition to any TSM chapter website, but standing alone as the face of any given chapter it is arguably not appropriate as a site for newcomers to the Movement to become involved.

It is agreed that the main focus of a TSM chapter website should be TSM, without the reliance on material of any other organization – TVP included – where there is material available via TSM that is adequate in providing an explanation. With ample material available it is expected that, if given an adequate time period in which to apply changes, any chapter requested to update the educational content of their website should be able to do so. Any chapter that is resistant to the use of TSM rather than TVP materials for educational purposes needs to critically examine their reason for such resistance.

e) Team Focus

- Zeitgeist Agriculture
- Zeitgeist Nutrition
- Zeitgeist Medicine
- Zeitgeist Architecture

It is clear that only a selection of the project groups within the Colombian chapter are listed here. This is in no way an accurate representation of the chapter's focus, but is, instead, a selection of four from a much larger number of active project groups in the chapter. These groups are not listed at the forefront of the chapter's activity, but are accessible via a transparent and horizontally structured Open Atrium platform. Many other chapters have links on their main site to project teams and groups – many of which are of a similar type. It is clear that TSM Colombia are fulfilling their main objectives as a chapter, and are also engaging in a variety of other projects that make the chapter more holistic in focus.

With regard to a focus that is not strictly in line with the aims and ethos of TSM there are other chapters whose websites contain information that could be considered not entirely in line with, but not contrary to the Movement (e.g. no chapter condones violence or solicits open donations). As an example, the Czech Republic chapter has a section for articles, with sub-sections devoted to cooking, health and lifestyle. These are not simply on a Facebook page or Open Atrium site, but are clearly displayed on the main page.

It is agreed that a more holistic focus within any given chapter may reflect the micro-culture within that region or chapter, and is to be considered a natural facet of an emergent movement. Unless any chapter promotes values or projects that are either directly contrary to the aims and ethos of the Movement or are a clear attempt at hijacking the agenda, then the chapter is not to be criticized or harassed for their inclusion of a broad demographic of interests.

2. Chapter Coordination

According to the Colombia Chapter Review, the following problems have been encountered with regard to the Colombia chapter coordination.

- Nobody assumed the coordination once Gabriel Vivas (former National Coordinator) left the country to France
- Members as Erick and Oskar state: Everyone is a coordinator in Colombia, we don't have leaders and we don't want them either.

It is unusual for a chapter to not have coordinators. However, this does not mean that it is unacceptable. The coordination protocol clearly stipulates that it is necessary to have a clear point of contact established in every chapter. If there is a clear point of contact in a chapter for GCA representatives and visitors to the website then this is deemed sufficient for the sake of effective and efficient communication. This point of contact does not have to remain the same indefinitely, nor be restricted to a single individual. If the responsibility for fielding such communication is passed from one individual to another, or is the shared responsibility of a group of volunteers, then this is acceptable as a means of achieving the aim.

In this emergent movement which describes itself as horizontal and holographic it is to be expected that chapters will experiment with a variety of governance structures, with the aim of achieving the most horizontal and holographic structure possible for their individual stage of development. The imposition of a rule stipulating that there must be a hierarchical structure with one named coordinator is a notion born of an out-dated social structure favouring hierarchy – one that the Movement claims to be moving away from.

3. Visible Chapter Activity

According to the Colombia Chapter Review, the following problems have been encountered with regard to Colombian chapter activity.

- There is no report from the chapter since 2011
- There are no activities found in media, they use very well their 'zeitgeist cafe' to talk and/or organize activities in facebook or Open Atrium such as this "Experimental Farm" <http://www.zeitgeistcolombia.com/equipos/agricultura/node/645>

Although there is a formal chapter report protocol it is true that many chapters do not provide the monthly reports that they are required to do. With the majority of chapters failing to comply with this requirement it is clear that another method of communication between chapters is needed if the arbitrary dissolution of the majority of chapters due to non-compliance is to be avoided.

Many chapters provide reports of their activity at international chapter meetings, although there is often a long waiting period between meetings and insufficient time at meetings for each chapter to be properly represented – in addition to the fact that many chapters are unable to be represented at such meetings due to time-zone issues.

It is arguably the case that formal reporting is not a necessity for any chapter. It is arguably the case that the role of the GCA is to assist chapters in their development and aid them in dealing with any issues they face. With this being the role of the GCA it is arguably sensible for the GCA to consult with the chapters they are responsible for assisting in ways that suit the functionality and development level of the group. Access to a transparent Open Atrium platform – as is already the case with the Colombian chapter – or a Trello board, or even a google-group, is arguably ample as a substitute for formal reporting as all information is clearly available without the need for duplication and bureaucratic form-filling.

4. Issues with Chapter members

According to the Colombia Chapter Review, the following problems have been encountered with regard to particular volunteers of the Colombian chapter. All complaints have been reported, recorded, and investigated by the people to whom they pertain, and not by any impartial third party. In the case of complaints it is best practice for mediation and investigation to be made by an impartial third party, and not the individual who has made the complaint. The complaints protocol stipulates that complaints regarding a chapter or national coordinator are to be investigated and dealt with by the GCA. In the case of the Colombian chapter I, as a Spanish-speaking GCA representative, offered on multiple occasions to mediate between the Colombian chapter and the complainants as the GCA representative closest to the chapter is one of the complainants, thus leading to a conflict of interests regarding solution of the case. However, my offers have never been taken seriously, with proposed invitations to mediate at meetings never upheld and the intentional blocking of my attempts at mediation at the most recent meeting of Monday 5th November 2012.

Complaints made against the Colombian chapter are as follows:

- Formal Complaints received with documents and recordings in GCA.
 - Andres Delgado to chapters@thezeitgeistmovement.com March 04 2012 (verbal violence from Erick)
 - Jorge Forero GCA Issue form March 14 2012 (verbal violence from Erick)
- Informal Complaints.
 - Nelson Alvarez ad hominem attack October 1, 2011 received by Erick in a TS3 2 hours or more of conversation shared with more than 20 members hearing “Nelson you are a Liar”, Colombia has deleted the recording but there are witness members aware of that recording like Gabriel Vivas, who heard the full informal meeting next day October 2. (there is an email of that)
 - Indirect disrespect to all Latin coordinators and members from Erick saying “let’s all go tomorrow to the latinamerican meeting, there are only stubborn people there (Erick recorded)

These complaints are statements of actions that have taken place, but no evidence is presented at this stage. The phrase “verbal violence” needs to be clearly defined in order for any complaint to be dealt with as such; and complaints that being referred to as “a liar” constitute an ad-hominem attack are only valid if the attack was against the character of the individual and not their argument – a case that can only be examined given the context of the comment. In order for any complaint to be properly investigated evidence must be provided to an impartial third party who is to conduct the investigation. It is the case here that the motion to close the Colombian chapter has been put forward by those responsible for making the aforementioned complaints – all of which pertain to a single individual within the Colombian chapter, and not to the chapter itself.

If a chapter is to be dissolved on the basis of one or more complains made then it is agreed that those complaints must pertain to the functioning of that chapter, and not simply to the conduct of an individual volunteer toward any other. Complaints pertaining to the conduct of an individual volunteer may result in actions being taken with regard to that volunteer, but not the punishment of their entire chapter. It is also arguably the case that the informal complaints recorded in this case, despite being potentially offensive to some volunteers, are not sufficiently serious as to warrant the threatened closure of a chapter.

5. Criticism from chapter members

According to the Colombia Chapter Review, the following problems have been encountered with regard to criticism emerging from volunteers in the Colombian chapter. What is referred to here as criticism is a series of comments made by individual volunteers with the Colombian chapter, and are not necessarily taken to be the consensus of the chapter:

- “We have entered the second stage of projects, even when the global movement hasn’t” (Erick recorded)
- “The Protocols were an imposition from a few on the top” (Erick recorded)
- “The movement is horizontal and the global moderators don’t act as such” (Erick recorded)
- “The Chapter Guide is just a Guide, you don’t need to follow it” (Erick email to all hispanic speak googlegroup)
- “The One Planet Project is just to collect emails and promote Peter’s films and not our films” (Erick Recorded)
- A conspirative perspective showing repetitive complaints against the US Government, UN and Corporations.
- Complaints of why the global movement doesn’t react against them are constantly heard in Colombian meeting recordings, or for example this facebook post on July 01-2012:

“I agree that technology should be used to our advantage, but according to the current model of government investments, will the largest sums be invested in technology for better living? Is the Global ZM winning their fight in the prioritization of technology towards the construction of an EBR? Should not TZM Global, with 500 thousand members and its mented CRITICAL MASS, be questioning the WWF or other UN to avoid this kind of things instead of being in an eternal fight regarding organizational issues? What technology is being used for today?” (Oskar in several latino facebook about new usa technology weapons, picture saved)

It is arguably the case that such perspectives are not restricted only to volunteers with the Colombian chapter, of whom only two are mentioned in this complaint. Such complaints based on comments made by individual volunteers represent an attempt to criminalize certain actions or viewpoints within the Movement rather than openly accepting the variety of views that we may all hold. It is an invalid criticism levelled against an entire chapter to hold that the chapter should be dissolved due to the views of a single volunteer that any given project is unappealing to them, or that the Movement is inadequately following through on its ethos of horizontality. Complaints of this nature are not featured in the chapter protocol as sufficient reason to dissolve a chapter, and any attempt to dissolve a chapter on the basis of such complaints is a clear breach of protocol.

The use of a single Facebook post from a single individual to make a formal complaint against a chapter with the intent to dissolve that chapter is an absurd level of pettiness to stoop to. It is hoped that no such flimsy attempts are to be made in future as they absolutely fail to stand up to examination and are not worth the time spent investigating them.

Conclusion

To conclude this report it is pertinent to refer to the “ending notes” of Nelson Alvarez, author of the *Colombia Chapter Review* document:

Ending Notes

After the last coordinator Gabriel left Colombia, he was under pressure by other chapter members, but at that time (a year ago) he asked Gilbert and I to not interfere with that issue. I consider that was a mistake from Gilbert and I, there was excellent communication with the chapter before that, and right after Gabriel left everything became confusing because nobody oriented the movement and then a lot of different opinions, projects and horizontality interpretations started to show up.

So even that the chapter is very active, most of the activities are oriented not in spreading the information but including people by using different -non TZM related- kinds of projects.

Using these last words the chapter does not exist anymore as an official chapter and we need to wait for some volunteer who is willing to use the regular process... until then I suggest to use the third party chapter concept if it's possible to keep them near. There's nothing else to do with them, they can do what ever they want and like I said to Erik months ago in a 3 hours Skype conversation, they can be an example in the future of best organization, until now every time a chapter starts up, it's necessary to have a person or group of persons as voices to contact.

So I repeat, the chapter of Colombia is big enough to be cut off by an official mechanism. They shouldn't be compared with a "cancer", it is more like a "flu" at least in this part of the world because the rest of the chapters are getting prepared for this.

The former coordination did great things in the country and nearly 4000 can be contacted by our main mailing list at thezeitgeistmovement.com, therefore I recommend to take that channel as our communication tool in order to gain a new momentum and recover the focus in the Colombian chapter so it can regain its official status.

WE CAN'T LEAVE THIS PEOPLE <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mo7XGBArLe4>

Nelson Alvarez

In stating "the chapter does not exist anymore" this seems a little pre-emptive as there has been no consideration on the part of the GCA following this report. In fact, this report has not been presented to the GCA at all, but provided to me by an unnamed volunteer – who I have never met – who was present at the meeting at which a vote was held regarding the dissolution of the Colombian chapter. Documentary evidence of the vote held at this meeting is available by [clicking here](#).

According to the chapter protocol a chapter can be dissolved either due to it no longer being active, or by the GCA (the assumption being the whole GCA is inferred in this document as it is not stipulated that it is up to any particular member of the GCA) acting in accordance with the chapter protocol which stipulates that there are two conditions under which a chapter may be terminated:

1. Cessation of activity within the chapter that is observable for an extended period of time
2. Promotion of an agenda/direction that is contrary to the aims and ethos of the Movement

In the chapter protocol it is not stipulated that a chapter may be dissolved due to any of the reasons outlined in the *Colombia Chapter Review* document, nor that a chapter may be dissolved by a vote from volunteers outside that chapter who are neither directly affected by the chapter nor are GCA representatives. Voting is a decision-making method that is explicitly *not* endorsed by the Movement as per the decision-making protocol; and the inclusion of certain volunteers of chapters other than the Colombian chapter, and outside the GCA in this vote is a matter that remains this far unexplained by those responsible for the course of action taken. In fact, this vote and its implications are yet to be formally announced to the GCA, the body explicitly responsible for the decision in question.

In this case I see fit to complain that a gross misconduct has been carried out in the case of the Colombian chapter whereby a decision has been made in direct conflict with the chapter protocol, the coordination protocol, and the decision-making protocol, and that it has led to a negative impact on the wellbeing of volunteers working for a well-established and highly functional chapter. *As per the complaints protocol this report serves as a formal complaint submission to the GCA, against those responsible for the gross misconduct, to be investigated and rectified as per the appropriate protocols.*

The reference to the Colombian chapter as being “like a flu” rather than a “cancer” bears the connotation of the practices of the Colombian chapter being something to be feared for the possibility of contagion among other chapters. It remains to be considered why the chapter is referred to in this way, as a chapter in an emergent movement that has done nothing against protocol – or nothing that many other chapters haven’t done – should be appreciated for its collective efforts, and not treated like a disease to be excised for fear of contamination of other chapters with its emergent values.

In closing, I find that in the case of the Colombian chapter there is no compelling reason for the chapter to be closed. There are matters pertaining to the chapter website that can be improved, given time, but it is necessary to concede that these are matters that pertain to many other chapter websites, and that there is no convincing reason to single out the Colombian chapter for dissolution. In the case of the Colombian chapter it is clear that the GCA has not followed protocol, and has mounted a case for closure against a chapter that we should instead be assisting with development. I hope that this case provides a positive learning experience for all concerned, and that we can all proceed with a greater degree of clarity and integrity regarding what is expected of a chapter, the GCA, and our experience of advancing a new paradigm for a sustainable Earth.